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Catharine of Siena

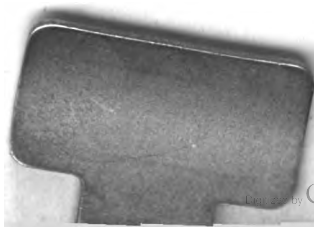
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**FROM THE BOOKS
OF**

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Oh how kind
from
Mary Hunter
Dear
Uncle John's love—
His
Loving Son

CATHARINE OF SIENA

AN

ANCIENT LAY PREACHER

A STORY OF

SANCTIFIED WOMANHOOD

AND

POWER IN PRAYER

BY

ARTHUR T. PIERSON

FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

THIS little book is a brief biographical sketch of one of the most remarkable women of history. It is especially fitted to inspire and stimulate consecrated womanhood. The elements of true testimony are independent of sex ; and there is an especial fitness in bringing to the front such a woman preacher in the day when godly women are first coming into real prominence as workers in the mission field at home and abroad, and when the sisterhood of the race seems to be for the first time mounting to the true throne of woman's influence and kingdom.

There is, however, a special reason for giving wide prominence to a sketch of this great and devoted woman, who exemplified the power of prayer to

make one of God's daughters a mighty witness to the truth and a great reformer both of church and state. But, further, the year 1897 marked the five hundred and fiftieth year since her birth in 1347. Again, she was in her way one of the most heroic, unselfish and truly great women of all the ages; and was a very effective lay preacher. She proved what a woman can accomplish in testimony for God.

We commend this simple story of the Middle Ages to the women of this privileged era, in the hope that it may provoke them to love and to good works, but most of all to devout and prevailing prayer.

CATHARINE OF SIENA

AN ANCIENT LAY PREACHER

CHAPTER I.

OF this most remarkable woman nearly if not quite fifty lives have been written, and in at least seven languages; and yet until of late very little has been known even in England and in America of her really marvelous life, character and career.

Siena, in Southern Tuscany, not far from Florence, was her birthplace, and in the Contrada d'Oca are still shown, with pride, the humble house and workshop of her father, and the chapel built to her memory, over the door of which, in golden letters, may be read, "Sposæ Christi Katharinæ domus"—"the house of Katharine, the spouse of Christ."

It has been said of this maiden of Italy, that, what St. Bernard was to the twelfth century, she was to the fourteenth—the light and support of the church. In the midst of widespread and deep-rooted ecclesiastical corruption, this daughter of a wool dyer actually became the reformer of abuses, and the rebuker of wrongs even in high places. It seems incredible that this child of a poor and humble tradesman, calmly addressed her remonstrances to kings and princes, cardinals and even popes; that she became a mediator between temporal and ecclesiastical powers; that she restored backsliders and reclaimed transgressors; that she preached to riotous mobs, dared the dangers of the awful plague, corresponded with potentates, and taught acknowledged teachers; that she traveled to Avignon, and persuaded Gregory XI. to forsake the charms of

his native land and return to Rome ; led a crusade against the Turks, and by her dying words helped to keep Urban VI. on the papal throne. Like St. Francis and St. Bernard, Savonarola and Luther, she acted both as a watchman to warn the church of approaching and impending dangers, and as a prophet to predict the coming days of disaster.

As soon as she could walk she formed a habit of wandering from home, and was called "the little vagrant." Even before she could plainly speak, it is said that the people of the neighborhood called her "Euphrosyne,"* because of the joy and satisfaction which her society brought them. Though not beautiful, her smile was captivating, and there was a strange light in her eyes. She seemed an incarnation of truth and love; her frank-

* One of the graces, supposed to preside over the influences which make life cheerful.

ness disarmed prejudice and distrust, and her affection drew even foes toward her.

The lives of the Fathers of the Desert had early awakened in her a devout desire to imitate their austerities, and court similar retirement, which led her eventually to assume the mantle of the order of St. Dominic—hence the name, *Mantellata*. At twelve years of age, her parents and brothers had already begun to plan for her marriage, but she met all such advances with determined resistance, enduring almost incredible opposition, and claiming that she was irrevocably wedded to a heavenly bridegroom; until her father not only acquiesced in her decision, but forbade any one longer to oppose her. She then made of her little private room a sort of sanctuary, where she devoted herself to prayer and the study of the will of God; for three years rarely leaving this cell.

She was habitually abstemious both as to food and sleep, using the plainest fare, the coarsest clothing, and the hardest bed. She said in later life that her vigils had cost her more struggle than anything beside; and the more because she was never a strong or well woman, but suffered all her days from a malignant form of dyspepsia, attended with frequent nausea and nervous prostration.

Catharine was well grown before she taught herself to read, so that she might peruse and study the Word of God, as well as other writings. But so fast did she learn this new art, that it was rumored that she had been a pupil of Gabriel himself. Years later she also learned the kindred art of writing. It seems beyond belief that, with all this lack of early culture, this woman's style should have been so commanding in dignity and beauty, that it has been compared with that of

Dante, and that some have ranked her as a formative power in the shaping of the Italian language as it existed in after times.

This saint of the fourteenth century was a scholar in God's school, and, after subtracting all the mere legendary tradition that has glorified her name, we can not doubt that few women of her day, or of any other age, have deserved so high a rank. It was not until 1373, when she was twenty-six years old, that she made the acquaintance of Raymond of Capua, who became her spiritual director; but even he was more her pupil than her master. It was about the same time also that she began to undertake her missions of importance to other cities beside Siena.

CHAPTER II.

Looking at Catharine's public life, we may say that it began with the second quarter-century of her history. It was then she was drawn out of her seclusion and retirement, and henceforth became a factor in the busy world of mankind. At this time her father was dead, and the three brothers were living in Florence, and the mother, Lapa, with this daughter, remained in the house at Siena. Before this time, during the epoch of revolution, which sent many into banishment, she had been led, little by little, to mix herself with her brethren and sisters in this earthly exile. At first she had met with resistance this impression of duty. How could she change a life of ceaseless prayers and vigils for a life

of secular toil and worldly cares? She felt that the Lord was sending her from His side; but He seemed to her to say, "My child, be calm; I desire not thy separation from Me, but thy closer union with Me by thy charity towards others." Moreover, she felt her sex to be a great obstacle to her public service in the world of humanity. But the Lord made her to understand that, as a rebuke to the perverted wisdom and misguided power of the age, He would make simple, untaught *women*, frail of body and obscure of origin, His prophets to reprove the wise and mighty of this world. Catharine then, without hesitation, left the cell of the recluse and went forth, with a conscious mission and commission, to the world. She acted in her father's house as a servant to all, and began to visit the widows and orphans in their affliction, and to relieve the poverty and misery about her, rising every

morning early to distribute to the necessities of the poor. But she had been for years practising almsgiving. When little more than sixteen, she became a Mantellata, the first "*sister*" of St. Dominic ever enrolled, and was for years absorbed in various offices of love.

Her life was laid amid eventful scenes—not only a pestilence of moral evil in the church, but a literal plague which, in 1348, and again, thirteen and twenty-six years later, visited Italy. In Siena in four months it carried off 30,000 victims. The contagion spread at a fearful rate and communicated itself with awful facility. To talk with one who was smitten was often as fatal as the touch. Men, women, and even dumb beasts fell dead in the public highways. Birds and beasts of prey would not approach the corpses, which were flung into large ditches in promiscuous heaps, as

after some desolating war. And, because anything approaching melancholy was believed to predispose to the attack, wild mirth was resorted to in hilarious revels. But Catharine was found ministering to the victims of this scourge of God, and doing her utmost to serve the smitten and the dying, even when their own kinsfolk fled in terror from them. She went, full of faith and love, night and day, through the hospitals and homes of Siena, speaking words of help and hope to the sick and perishing. She had not in vain prayed for the gift of fortitude and the grace of unselfishness.

In 1374, when the plague visited the country a third time, she was about twenty-seven years old. Those who would understand Catharine must follow her to this region of the shadow of death. When the hoarse cries of grave diggers were heard through the streets, "*Bring out your dead!*"—

when "corpses were borne out by other corpses;" when those who carried the dead, and sometimes the priests themselves, sat down, no more to rise; when in some cases no one responded to the demand of the *becca morti*, because, as the horrible scent of decay alone testified, there were no living left to bring out the dead—surely it was a time to try the stoutest heart. Even government forgot its duties, and the places of judgment were forsaken; business was at a halt, and crops stood rotting in the fields. Of course, the rich forsook the city, and the poor trembled before the scourge of God. Yet, at this time, when the breath of death was in the very air, Catharine and her fellow Mantellatas behaved with sublime courage and devotion. They went among the lowest of the people, and into the worst quarters. They wrapped the livid corpses in their shrouds, and

sang hymns of joy in the houses of mourning. It was then that Catharine's "mystic family" of associates and helpers became cemented together by an unselfish and divine passion for souls.

Those who knew her best loved her most ; she was to them like pure gold without alloy ; not the least shade of melancholy was on her face, which bore an habitual smile, gracious, cheerful and even mirthful. Though at times keenly suffering, she was wont to dwell so much on the sufferings of her Lord that her own seemed to her as nothing.

CHAPTER III.

Catharine was subject to her trials ; and not the least was the assault of slanderous and violent tongues. Tecca, a beggar woman and a leper, whom she nursed when no one else would, and visited in the pest house, with incredible ingratitude turned against her a leprous tongue, and charged her with unholy relations with the "dear friars," and so accounted for her long stay at the church of the Dominicans. Even Andrea, one of the Sisters of St. Dominic, whom Catharine with similar devotion comforted when dying of cancer, with a like incredible malice publicly calumniated her benefactress. These slanders gained ground, and subjected her to cruel treatment.

Palmerina, a lady of Siena, moved by jealousy, also spoke against her ; but the prayers of Catharine were answered for her, and Palmerina publicly vindicated her and blamed herself. What Catharine had thus undergone, led her to judge tenderly every one else, lest the injustice done to herself might be done to others, as innocent. And again, as she emerged from the furnace of trial, a fresh spiritual baptism was in store for her, and the Lord appeared to her and assured her that her life should henceforth be filled with marvels, but that ignorant and carnal men would refuse to believe in her piety and sincerity. This was literally true. Even after her visions of God, which left such irremovable marks upon her person that the multitudes were attracted by her countenance, and, during her stay at Pisa, enemies seemed to multiply as well as friends. The austerity of her life and

the fervency of her prayers, aroused hostile criticism. Vanity, and even an evil possession were ascribed to her.

Plots were laid to "expose" her pretensions. For example, a certain physician and a renowned jurist attempted to confound her by proposing to her hard questions on Scripture.

"It is said, God spake in order to create a world. Has God, then, a mouth and tongue?"

After apologizing for her lack of culture and knowledge, she meekly replied: "What benefit to you or me to know *how* God spake! God is a spirit, and what is needful is to know that our Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, took our nature and died for our salvation. . . . This is the true science."

She spoke with such holy fervor that the jurist, unable to restrain tears, took his crimson velvet cap from his

head, and on his knees besought her forgiveness for conspiring to perplex or tempt her ; and so a foe was turned into a friend. A letter was sent her, by another party, who meant to inflict pain through rebuke and censure; but she thanked the author for his valuable advice, meekly construing his intent as pure.

She had remarkable insight into character, and seemed to read almost at sight the true state of the hearts she met in close contact. She saw the hidden ambition, avarice, lust, worldliness, resentment, and other rankling vices that estranged people from each other, and alienated them from God, and frankly rebuked these evils, often bringing men to reconciliation with God and each other. She seemed to be endowed with prophetic gifts, as is common when great power in intercession combines with great insight into truth, and she lived

herself in so exalted a realm of virtue and piety that habitual sobriety became a frame of mind with her, and a frivolous word seldom escaped her.

Sometimes parties, actually in snares of vice, but respectable in appearance, would come to her, nominally as inquirers. But she would refuse communication with them. "First let us purify ourselves from our faults, and escape the bondage of Satan, and then we will talk about God." And so she often repelled those who were afterwards discovered to be incorrigible profligates and hypocrites.

So remarkable and so frequent were her approaches to the most obstinate and inaccessible evil doers, that Pope Gregory XI., hearing how God was manifestly with her, by a special "bull" gave authority to three parties, her companions, to accompany her in her missions, and invested them with certain powers ordinarily reserved

for bishops. One of these was Raymond, to whom we owe no little information as to her character and career. He testifies to having seen thousands of men and women thronging around her from all the country about Siena, as if suddenly summoned by some mysterious trumpet. Often she had to address great numbers at once, and, even when her voice could not reach them, her looks and presence moved them to abandon their evil doings and seek a peace such as that which transfigured her own face. All day long men and women were making confessions of sin and crime, until, like her Master, she had no leisure so much as to eat. She seemed wonderfully upborne, kept from depression and even exhaustion, and her prayers were as unceasing as her labors were untiring.

Catharine loved children dearly, as every true woman does, but with a

deep devotion such as only a holy woman can feel. She was deeply attached to a daughter of a jurist at Siena, a child who from eight years was lunatic, or believed to be a demoniac. Her parents had tried every source of help, medical and spiritual, known to them, and at last brought the case of little Laurencia to Catharine's notice. Strange to say, she avoided this child, and actually hid herself as one in fear, stopping her ears that she might not hear the shrieks of the struggling girl, and forbidding any one to speak to her of the demoniac. Behind this apparent cowardice may have been concealed the bitterness of her own awful conflicts with Satan. She said of herself: "I am myself daily tormented with the devil, and can I deliver others?" Was it this daily wrestling against principalities and powers, and this sense of the awful power of her dia-

bolical adversaries, that made her timid to undertake any further contests for others? Father Thomas della Forte brought the child to Catharine's room in her absence, enjoining the servants that she was to remain with her all night. Catharine, on her return, unable to escape this contact, constrained the child to kneel with her and pray with her. The struggle was an all night one; and a double one, for she was using all her energy of will to subdue the child, and all her power in prayer to drive out the evil spirit. She sweat at every pore, until she almost fell exhausted. Early in the morning she was found still praying, the child asleep on her bed. She kept Laurencia for days beside her, that she might confirm her in her recovery. And one night, after she had dismissed her, she was seized with such apprehensions concerning her that she would not wait for morning hours, but

made haste to seek her, and found her in a paroxysm of terror. She clasped her in her arms and bade the evil one to flee. The little lunatic again became calm, and lived for sixteen years after, sane and sound in body and mind. This was not the only case, reported in Catharine's biography, of command over those who seemed to be possessed of demons.

CHAPTER IV.

Catharine was very young when she began to have those remarkable visions of God and of heavenly things which are the principal feature of her life history. The little chapel of the church of St. Dominic was her favorite resort for prayer, and there she passed hours of rapt communion with the unseen. One vision of Jesus is recorded when she was but six years old, and from that day she was more gravely thoughtful. Nothing had more to do with the secret sources of Catharine's life of power than this constant converse of soul with God, as may be seen in the little book, "The Dialogue," which represents her familiar habit of conversing with God as one talks with a friend. We find, in her Dialogue and Letters, certain frequent expressions,

“The Lord said unto me,” etc., which show that she was wont to talk with God and to hear a voice speaking to her soul (Numbers vii : 89).

We touch this part of her history with a reverent hand, for we dare not criticise anything so solemn. Only those who have lived as close to God as she, are competent to speak with discernment of such matters. There are depths and heights of supplication, and especially of intercessory prayer, never yet sounded or reached by us; and only when those mysteries are practically explored can we determine the possibilities of the secret sanctuary of prayer. Prayer, as Mrs. Butler says in her charming biography of Catharine, is the “experimental science.” “It can not be truly called communion if the only voice heard be the voice of the pleader.”

Among the noticeable features of her secret vigils were the awful temp-

tations of the devil, to which she was at times subject. Her contact with Satan was as vivid and personal as was her communion with her Savior ; and the form which her temptations sometimes assumed was that of impure orgies, in which all manner of corruption was made to appeal to her eyes and ears. Her combats were past all description. Again, at times, her visions assumed a more captivating phase : the noblest of human lovers wooed and won her ; she seemed to be in a home of her own, clasping to her breast her own babe—when she awoke to find herself a lonely maiden in the cell of her own chosen separation unto God. But the “angels came and comforted her.” Music too heavenly for earthly ears seemed to salute and comfort her, and she fell at the feet of her celestial Spouse—cheerfully accepting her destiny—to live a solitary life for God and man.

Perhaps the most memorable of all her visions, or " dialogues " was one in which demons seemed to be relentlessly pursuing her, and inviting her to share in their diabolical revels. All sorts of suggestions, sensual and cynical, impure and blasphemous, the fiery darts of Satan, were hurled at her. And to make the torment insupportable, God Himself seemed to have forsaken her, as He did for one awful moment her vicarious Savior on his cross of shame, so that she seemed to be left to devilish hate and wiles. But, instead of ceasing to pray, she increased her supplication, and without a murmur waited for God to interpose, though her little room at the Fullonica seemed so hopelessly infested and infected with the presence of demons, that she sought her other sanctuary in the chapel. There again the evil spirits followed her with taunts, and threats of final victory ; but she could

only respond, "I will, if need be, endure until death." And, on thus determining that nothing should part her and her Lord, a light above the brightness of the midday sun shone round about her, and the assurance of God filled her soul and drove away the demons.

She tells us how the Lord now drew near and spoke with her, and of the strange "dialogue" that followed:

"Lord, where wast Thou when my heart was so tormented?"

"I was in the midst of thine heart, Catharine."

"Lord, Thou art the everlasting truth, and before Thy Word I humbly bow; but how can I believe that Thou wert in my heart when thoughts so utterly hateful filled it?"

"Did these suggestions and temptations of Satan give thee pleasure or pain, Catharine?"

“ Exceeding pain and distress, O Lord.”

“ Thou wast in woe and distress, Catharine, because in the midst of thy heart I was hidden ; it was My presence that made these thoughts intolerable to thee. Thou didst strive to repel them, because they filled thee with sorrow, and, because thou didst not succeed, thine heart was bowed down with deep sorrow. When the time for the conflict had passed, I sent forth My light to drive away the death shade. Because thou hast with thy whole heart endured these trials thou art for ever delivered. It is not thy trouble that pleases Me, but the will that has courageously endured this trial ! ”

Catharine never afterward got into this darkness of death, and Gethsemane of diabolical conflict, until just before her decease. It was after the last and greatest of her diabolical temptations, described above, that she

had that strange vision, and entered into that "mystical marriage," which has suggested to so many Italian painters the theme of their art work. In these pictures the Virgin Mary is depicted as guiding the hand of the infant Jesus in placing upon Catharine's finger the symbolic ring. From this time, she regarded herself as inseparably and exclusively the bride of Christ.

CHAPTER V.

Catharine did not protest against false *doctrine*, but effectually did she contend against unholy *practice*. This has been to a great extent true of all pioneers in reformation. Luther and Knox, Wycliffe and Huss, Savonarola and Chrysostom, all of them fought primarily the moral corruption of their age. This has generally been the primary work ; then subsequently and secondarily has come the correction of doctrinal error. It has been said of Catharine that her life was not long enough to get to this, the second stage of the work of reform.

From the *prayers* of God's saints, their whole system of theology may be gathered, and from her written prayers we may discover her real practical

opinions. With one exception, those prayers are all addressed to Father, Son, or Holy Ghost. Even the one prayer on the Feast of the Annunciation, which contains an apostrophe to the Virgin, suddenly breaks off in a rapturous address to the Eternal God. She found not enough charm, even in the traditional "mother of God," to hold her devout spirit.

One important lesson of her life is that while she was to the last, as she supposed, a loyal adherent of the Romish Church, there had been an unconscious elimination of many doctrines taught by papal priests. Holding as she did to the Head, and guided as she was by the Word of God, she unconsciously let go her traditional beliefs and notions, in the tenacity of her hold on the great essential truths of the Gospel. She said of the great truth — Jesus died for me — "This is the true science." Her whole life

shows her one aim to have been that of Paul which he expressed in the third chapter of Philippians.

God puts all His noblest servants through His furnace-fire, and perfects them through suffering. All her days Catharine labored under physical infirmities, but in later life, especially superinduced by the exposures she suffered in the plague, her delicate nervous system, so finely strung, and so responsive to all human affection and aspiration, became a source of keenest anguish and distress. Head-aches, of the most violent sort, compelled her often to rest on her bed for hours, day by day, in darkness, solitude and silence. She often fainted, and once, at least, was for comparatively a long time insensible, and was apparently dead for a whole day. During this time she was in a trance, and wept bitterly when she awoke, reluctant to come back from such heights

of Transfiguration to the Gethsemane of pain, toil, and conflict with evil. Henceforth she spoke much and often of the anguish of her Lord, and with the thought of His passion absorbing her, prayed to be a partaker of His sufferings. She had come to the period of soul travail—to that valley of the shadow of death, where her friends felt that she must be left alone with God. The mystery of His dealings was to them an unfathomable deep, as it is to this day.

One day, alone in the little chapel of St. Christina, she remained longer than usual in a trance, prostrate and immovable, with her forehead on the earth. After a silence both long and motionless, she slowly assumed the kneeling posture—then rose and stretched forth her arms, her face all afire as one engrossed in some divine passion and heavenly vision; and after some minutes she fell, as if struck with

death, and was borne to her bed. On coming to herself, she whispered, "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Later in the day she got strength to speak further of the wondrous vision of her crucified Lord. His wounds seemed to her fountains of heavenly light: "The five bright rays streaming towards me pierced my hands, and my feet, and my side, with an acute pain, and I fell as one dead. I besought my Lord that His blessed wounds might not visibly appear in my own body; hence, none but myself knows my secret pain." This she said because she remembered how superstitious worship had been paid to the great St. Francis, of Assisi, because of similar "stigmata." For days Catharine suffered both great weakness and great pain; and subsequently told a friend that her anguish in realizing Christ's sufferings was intensest at the moment when she was

pleading most fervently for the salvation of some whom she intensely loved. "Promise me that 'Thou wilt save them, Lord! And, oh, give me some token that 'Thou wilt!'" she cried. Then the Lord Jesus seemed to clasp in His pierced hands her outstretched hand, and when it was released, it was as tho a nail had been driven through her palm.

CHAPTER VI.

In 1376, on New Year's day, Catharine was taken with fever, and for four long months her life was hanging in the balance. At last, from an hour of prayer, she rose, as, says another, "with the fortunes of Christendom in her hand; her voice was now to be heard above all the discord and voices of the world, and she was about to trace, with a firm, unfaltering hand, the path in which men ought to walk." That same day she wrote to the pope to convince him it was his duty to return at once to Italy, and again and again she wrote him, at times filially, at times parentally, but always as one having authority from God. She reminded him of the corruption of the clergy, and the misrule

of papal legates, and that the only hope of the church was that he should leave Avignon and return to Rome. Subsequently this simple-minded woman was herself chosen by all parties in Florence to undertake a mission of pacification to the papal court at Avignon, at the time of political agitation and turmoil. What power must a weak woman have attained over church and state when all look to her as mediator! She cherished in her heart three great objects: First, to restore peace between the pope and his revolted subjects; second, to secure the pope's return to Rome; and third, to organize a new crusade.

On June 18, 1376, she entered Avignon, a young woman not yet thirty. She was conducted to the hall of the consistory, where the pope and cardinals were sitting in solemn state. What a scene that must have been! Gregory in his magnificent robes, seated on his

majestic throne, in the midst of a circle of purple-clad cardinals. Catharine in her white serge gown and well-worn and patched Dominican mantle, confronting this imperial court. What was her secret! It was the authority of God which reigned in her. She came as an ambassador from the highest court, and, because she felt the presence of One, in comparison with whom the greatest of human potestates is insignificant, she was courageous and confident. Gregory looked on her with silent astonishment, then with a holy awe, and, before she opened her lips, he felt the power that was within and behind her. Her ascendancy over him was from the first complete. And, after she had presented the matter of her mission, the pope said: "I commit the treaty of peace wholly to your decision. I wish the negotiation to rest wholly in your hands, and entrust to you the church's

honor !” It was not till two years later that she saw the end of her labors attained. But the point we would impress is the womanly scepter Catharine exercised over this weak, irresolute man. She had frequent audiences with him, and at his desire often spoke to the cardinals and prelates, and with awful austerity rebuked the scandalous life and shameful example of the clergy. One day, speaking to the Consistory on the subject of the church, she asked why it was that in the pontifical court, where all virtues should find a congenial soil, disgraceful vices flourished like evil weeds. She was asked how she had come to know so much about the court at Avignon; and with a singular air of authority, her thin white hand uplifted toward God, she said : “ I declare in the name of almighty God, that I perceived more distinctly in my little room at Siena the horrors of the sins here committed

than do even those who are in the midst of these vices." There was something in this woman which moved men to say, "Never woman so spake."

Every influence was brought to bear on Gregory to induce him to stay at Avignon. His state rooms were unrivaled for splendor and sumptuousness, and abounded in art treasures and literary riches. There was organized resistance to his removal on the part of cardinals, especially the French, and appeals were made to his fears that a plot for poisoning him was formed at Ostia. The great ladies of his court—the "voluptuous academy"—exercised great influence at Avignon, and were in a flutter of excitement over Catharine's strange power. They sought either to corrupt her simplicity or thwart her errand.

The liturgical festivals in the great basilica were attended by the whole court. The pope presided in cloth of

gold ; on his head a silver mitre with pendants of crimson silk ; on his feet green velvet slippers resting on a velvet cushion ; his hands in gloves of embroidered cloth of silver, bedecked with gold and pearls, and bearing the words "Jesu" and "Marie" in emeralds. He sat on a Byzantine throne of white marble, canopied with crimson velvet, and all about him corresponded in splendor. But behind all this was a moral corruption that even this grandeur did not really conceal. The proud mistresses of the cardinals eyed Catharine with jealousy and hate, and one of them, feigning deep devoutness, followed Catharine to the church, and while kneeling beside her, pierced her foot with a sharp stiletto — perhaps she desired but had not courage to strike at a more vital part !

CHAPTER VII.

Tried sorely by Gregory's vacillation, Catharine withdrew for a time into seclusion, for passionate intercession with God, until the pope actually summoned her to his presence, and said, "Catharine, I ask you not for *advice*. *Declare to me the will of God.*" She then faced him boldly with the charge that he had bound himself by a secret vow. He was startled, for he had secretly pledged himself to return to Rome, but he thought no one knew it. From that moment his mind was made up, and he determined to forsake this earthly paradise and go to restore to Rome the glory of the papacy, and Catharine took a route of her own to Toulon. At Genoa she met and welcomed him joyfully, and when the

effort was made even yet to deter him from completing his journey, Catherine resolutely interfered, and met, alone, the courtiers whose conspiracy would have turned him back to Avignon. She never came unbidden into the presence of the pope, nor volunteered advice. But he was so under her control that he sought her at night, in her own house, for counsel, and when he left her she pleaded sleeplessly for him until morning. On his triumphal entry into the Eternal City, she was alone in her little cell at Siena, quietly waiting upon God for new preparation for coming duty. Then she urged the pope to push forward the reforms which alone could save the church.

When Urban VI. came into power, he, like Gregory before him, sought guidance and help of this simple saint of Siena. In October, 1378, he besought her to come to Rome and sup-

port him in the trials that surrounded him. More than forty persons went with her, some of them nobles on foot and in the garb of poverty, and she besought them all to live in great simplicity in Rome, as a rebuke to the prevailing luxury. She never again saw Siena, but died in Rome sixteen months later. There, as at Avignon, she addressed the Consistory, and the pope was awed by her fidelity to truth and her intrepidity of bearing. In the schism caused by the rival popes, she did her best to rally supporters for Urban, whom she considered the legitimate papal head of the church. But above all she sought to surround him with pure and pious counselors. She urged the creation of a sort of community of men whose virtue, wisdom, and sanctity were preeminent, and herself wrote to certain friars, who were in repute for piety, asking their presence at Rome. From these letters extracts

might be made which reveal the power of this woman, whom God had so taught. Indeed, it was said that during all these years of disturbance it was Catharine who ruled at Rome. Her labors were almost superhuman, and she was sought by poor and rich, high and low, chiefs of the army and prelates of the church. Her utterances and her letters at this time were fragrant with heavenly wisdom, and particularly were they marvelous in their emphasis upon *prayer* as something which, when offered in the name of Christ and directed to real blessings, is *never refused*.

On her third visit to Florence, this holy mediatrix in times of trouble met the violence of foes who felt that she was a hindrance to their crimes. They set up a cry that she was the enemy of the public weal and the democratic party, and drove her from one house to another by pillage and fire, until no

one dared to receive her. Martyrdom seemed before her. But with no loss of tranquillity she retired into a hiding place for prayer, and then came forward joyfully, and met the armed bands as her Master did before her, saying, "I am Catharine!" and it is said that the man who threatened her with a naked sword lost his strength and dropped his weapon.

Our purpose does not include the mere history of Catharine's times, and hence we have passed over the events which followed the death of Gregory in 1378, and the schism which succeeded; the election of Urban VI., and the excitement which attended his efforts at reform and putting a stop to simony. Catharine, like her contemporary, the monk John Wycliffe, continued to witness against the corruption of her day. The rival pope, Clement VII., was elected by the Frenchmen, and thus matters were

complicated. Catharine now wrote to Urban, and wisely counseled him to humility and patience. Over him, also, as we have seen, she exercised great influence.

Early in life Catharine conceived the idea of a *crusade*, as had so many before her; and this was one motive of her well-known journey to Avignon—to enlist Pope Gregory in a holy war against Turks and Saracens. She set herself to propagate this purpose in other minds. Hence came many of her letters and persuasive appeals. Her fervor and ardor were contagious, and produced for a time a marked movement in the minds of others. Men began to make preparations, and military chiefs laid plans. Women formed a company—"the servants of the pilgrims"—for the holy march. Discords in the church, however, hindered the crusade which was impossible without a united Christendom. Cath-

arine foresaw a rebellion among the laity, but foretold that the clergy would be found much the more culpable, and that a great schism was coming which would rend the church. She also foretold that, after many trials and tribulations, God would purify the church by means then unknown to man. Did she in the fourteenth century, as one of the reformers before the Reformation, forecast the great uplift and overturning of the sixteenth century?

CHAPTER VIII.

We must briefly advert to the death of this great woman of five centuries ago. From January, 1380, when she was about the age of her Lord when He suffered for sin, a great change was noticeable. She had a strange aversion to food, and water she could not take, although her throat seemed aflame. Yet she was sustained by a secret and indescribable strength and joy. In March she fell on the steps of St. Peter's, and was borne home. Her sufferings increased, but she said that her pains were not *natural*. "God allows the evil one thus to torment me." Her patience was perfect, and at times she rose, girded with supernatural strength, and always mighty in supplication. On the Sunday before Ascension Day she seemed

as one transparent, so far had the flesh seemed to be refined in the fire. Some one placed before her relics of the saints, but from them she turned to fix her gaze on the Crucified. Her language was that of confession and praise. Her exhortations, as he rend consciously drew near, were wonderful in wisdom and insight.

Here are some of the "Rules for spiritual advance," which she left behind :

1. "If any one would be a servant of God and possess Him, he must strip his heart of all selfish love of human creatures, and approach God with a simple and entire heart.

2. "No soul can arrive at such a state without prayer founded on humility. No one should rest on works, but acknowledge himself to be nothing, and commit himself wholly to God's keeping and leading. Through prayer, all virtues progress; without it, they are weakened.

3. "To attain purity of conscience, we must abstain from all rash and harsh judgments and evil speaking ; neither condemn nor despise any one, but bear with all, however vile, because in all amendment is possible.

4. "We must have perfect trust in God's providence, knowing that all things are not from His ill-will, but love."

Strange to say, like so many saints, her last days were days of awful Satanic assault, that can only remind us of Gethsemane. She seemed to be dead to all her surroundings, listening with terror to some dark and horrible accusation, or replying as with a wild and agonizing utterance. She was meeting the great "accuser" in a last awful struggle. Her face was a study, and a revelation of what was passing within. Occasionally an audible sentence would show how she was meeting the adversary. "No, never for

vainglory, but for the honor and glory of God ! ” Such words showed that the tempter was charging her with self-seeking. Perhaps sixty times she cried, “ Peccavi, Domine, miserere mei. ” (I have sinned, Lord, have mercy on me !) Then her face lit up with seraphic joy. Her last words were : “ *I go—not on account of my merits, but solely on account of Thy mercies. . .* Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. ” She died April 29, 1380, at the age of 33.

For three days the body lay in state in the church of St. Dominic. The crowds made necessary a body of sentinels. When the sermon was to be preached, it was impossible to secure calmness sufficient to allow the preacher to proceed. When at last he spoke, this is all he said :

“ This holy one has no need of our preaching and eulogy ; she herself speaks, and her life is her eulogy. ”

And he came down from the pulpit, not having begun his discourse. Siena craved her body for burial, and the pope decreed the "pious mutilation"—her head was severed from the body, and, with great ceremony, delivered to the ambassadors of her native city, in a coffer. A year later, two monks bore the coveted treasure thither, and it was received as if by some triumphal procession. To this day, the feast of St. Catharine is kept as an annual festival in May.

CHAPTER IX.

One of the main purposes of this sketch is to call attention to Catharine as a *preacher*. The yearning to preach was early awakened in her. She used, as a little girl, to gather her young companions, and with a strange eloquence she harangued them. She dreamed that St. Dominic came to her, and himself promised her the mantle she so much desired. She possessed that great attribute of a preacher for the people—the absence of all caste spirit. Her manners were remarkably gracious and graceful toward all alike, and her approach to others, like her openness to approach on their part, was singularly friendly and cordial. Those who came to her with an awe of her saintliness found themselves welcomed as with open arms. She was called the

“gracious lady,” the “daughter of the people,” and known by various other favorite names.

Studying Catharine as a lay preacher, we are naturally desirous to know somewhat further of the secrets of her power.

We may learn something from examples. Once she was asked to visit the Carthusian Community on Gorgon Island, not far from Leghorn, and speak to the monks. She manifestly spoke under the influence of the Holy Spirit, as all true preachers do, and with candor and holy intrepidity she referred to the subtle illusions and temptations to which solitaries are specially exposed, and of the means of escape from these snares. She showed both capacity and sagacity in her discourse; the method and manner were alike unexceptionable, and her eloquence was like a flowing river—or rather, an impetuous torrent—the

flowers of rhetoric not being sought and selected like flowers gathered and arranged by design, but rather like the blooms which such an overflowing stream finds in its course and sweeps on its bosom. But the power of her address was not merely human. Its central secret was this—she spoke as one taught of God. The Holy Spirit alone could give such insight into human character. Had she heard personal confessions from those monks, she could not more suitably and searchingly have addressed them.

Catharine's preaching became more and more influential. She felt herself specially called to this work by a fresh spiritual baptism, and she believed that God had especially assured her that, notwithstanding all opposition, criticism, and defamation, she should speak of Him to the lowly and great, the multitude, and the priests, monks, rulers, and pontiffs, and that speech and

wisdom should be granted to her that none could gainsay or resist; and in this confidence she bravely went forward.

Her power as a preacher largely depended on her identification with the sorrow, sin, and suffering of others. She asked and received of God the gift of seeing the possible loveliness of humanity even in its ruins—the statue in the marble—the angel in the demon. This unique power she exercised in reclaiming lost women to virtue, and subduing the vicious habits of profligate men given to gambling, drink, and debauchery.

Let us observe, again, that Catharine's power as a preacher was due in great part to her *mastery of God's Word*. At Avignon, at the papal court, the study of the Scriptures was not in fashion; but her addresses were Scripture explained and enforced. She had learned to wield the sword of the Spirit and amazed the doctors them-

selves. Three prelates of high rank—of whom it was said that their acquirements in learning would outweigh the whole of the rest of the Romish church—undertook to visit her, with haughty words and overbearing manner, to irritate and wound her. Her calmness, prudence, and wisdom disarmed them and discomfited them. One of them turned to the other two and said: “Why question her any more? She has replied to all these things more clearly than any doctor among us could have done!” And when they returned to the pope they confessed to never having found a soul so humble and so enlightened.

She learned to address multitudes. In 1368, when a young woman of twenty-one, she was acting as a peacemaker, mediating between employers and artisans; and on occasions spoke to crowds of two thousand people or more, with unusual power.

CHAPTER X.

The most vital element in Catharine's power was no doubt her frequent—we might say constant—communing with God. She often fell into ecstasy in prayer, when her soul seemed to leave the frail body and she became lost to surrounding scenes. It is to her devoted friend, Alessia, also a Mantellata, that we owe much of our knowledge of Catharine's devout habits. Alessia was her bosom friend and almost inseparable companion—a sort of other self. Sometimes she was permitted to share in Catharine's devotions. Catharine herself, however, kept a record of her prayers and pleadings with God, especially in crises of her life, and of God's remarkable interpositions in answer to her prayers. She also furnished memoranda of her

most remarkable spiritual experiences, and of those strange communications of God to her which we meet in that very unique book, "The Dialogue."

This remarkable woman impressed others, as few have ever done, that she had power to prevail in prayer. Even dignitaries of the church sought her help in great emergencies, believing that she could obtain from God whatsoever she might ask. This confidence was confirmed, as it was seen how many who had been sick, nigh unto death, were recovered in answer to her entreaties. She believed in the *prayer of faith* and its power to save the sick. And we may well ask, in view of many of such instances recorded in authentic history, by what authority we can affirm that God's miraculous works have ever, *in His plan*, ceased from among men; and we may well examine anew into the great question whether the cessation of these super-

natural gifts, so conspicuous in apostolic days, may not be wholly dependent on the decay of the simple faith, and the decline of the holy living, which marked apostolic times.

She prevailed with men because she first prevailed with God, for she, as we have seen, ranks among the great intercessors of history. One incident may suffice to illustrate both her sympathy with humanity and her secret power with Deity. Two notorious brigands were on their way to execution, condemned to have their flesh torn with hot pincers and then to be beheaded. Startled by outcries of torment and horror, Catharine looked out of the window as the first part of this program of torture was going forward. Turning away and falling on her knees, with tears and groans, she was heard by a fellow Mantellata to cry to God, " Ah, Lord, who art so full of pity, abandon not in their hour of

agony these poor creatures of Thine, redeemed by Thy precious blood." Then she pleaded for them, reminding the Lord of the sin of the woman who anointed his feet with tears, of the publican Matthew, of the denial of Peter, and of the promise to the dying thief. Obtaining leave to accompany these criminals to the city gate, she prayed unceasingly that God would hasten to relieve them. And when the cart that bore them halted at the city gate, "a ray of divine light penetrated the hearts of these two unhappy men," they confessed their guilt, sought forgiveness, prayed aloud, and so moved their executioners by their changed spirit and conduct that they dropped their instruments of torture, not daring to go on with the practical tragedy of cruelty.

In its last analysis all true power in preaching implies the virtue of *self abnegation*, well illustrated in Catharine of Siena. In the hill country of India,

says the legend, lived a queen, greatly beloved by her people, to whom her life was devoted. In olden times Chambrà suffered distress for want of water. The queen inquired of the gods how the curse of drought could be removed. The reply was, "If the ruler die for her people, abundant water shall be given." "Here am I," said the queen, and she consented to be buried alive for the sake of her people. Thereupon a fountain of pure, sweet water flowed from the spot, to quench the thirst of the people of Chambrà, visiting each hut with its life-giving blessing.

The pure waters of salvation gush from the grave of the Lord Jesus, and whoever will be a true blessing to humanity must, like Him, whose we are and whom we serve, consent to fall into the ground and die. So shall we not abide alone, but shall bring forth a harvest unto life eternal !

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